

Free Downloadable Discussion Guide

The Wesley Study Bible

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Discussion Guide by Bishop William H. Willimon

We stand in a long tradition of grace-filled teaching and preaching. John Wesley himself admonished us to be “people of the Book.” Given our vision pathway to teach the United Methodist Way, with great pleasure I introduce you to the Wesley Study Bible. It is a fresh way to hear God’s voice, share in God’s grace, and become more like Jesus Christ through the study of Scripture. With the WSB as a resource, we can testify to a grace-filled life that encourages a warmed heart and active hands.

The Bishops and the General Conference have offered pathways for us to walk as we grow in our Discipleship of Jesus Christ. The WSB is a great resource for pursuing the study of the Four Emphases. The Emphases are all key Wesleyan virtues and they provide the structure for this series of Bible studies in the Wesleyan tradition. Alone, or in a group of fellow Wesleyan Christians, you can use the four emphases from our vision pathways to a deeper faith in Christ and to more faithful discipleship and witness.

The Four Emphases:

- **Developing principled Christian leaders;**
- **Creating new places for new people by starting new congregations and renewing existing ones;**
- **Engaging in ministries with the poor;**
- **Improving global health, especially attacking the killer diseases of poverty.**

Permission is granted to reproduce this discussion guide.

Developing principled Christian leaders

1. Read Exodus 6:2-13, 28-30; 7:1-7; Acts 9:1-31. Check out the Wesleyan Core Terms (listed in the Index of Wesleyan Core Terms in the front of the WSB) for Superintendency, Itinerancy, Circuit Rider, Authority, Women Leadership, Pastor. Check out the Life Application Topics (see Index in WSB) for The Laborers are Few, Leadership and Pride.

Don't you find it curious that when God calls people into leadership, God seems to call the wrong people? Hothead, poor public speaker Moses. Persecutor of the church Saul. Adulterer David. Why do you think God's choices of leaders are different from our expectations for the "great leader"?

2. Read Mark 9:30-37 and Luke 22:24-27. Jesus says that his disciples, his leaders, don't lead the way that the "Gentiles" lead. What are the qualities of a truly biblical, faithful leader?

3. Read 1 Corinthians 13. Paul was not only a great missionary to the Gentiles, but he was also the most influential of the early church's leaders. In this segment from one of Paul's letters we see Paul leading an early congregation. What insights about leadership in the church do you derive from reading this passage?

Activities

AS A GROUP:

Take one or two of the selected passages and questions above and discuss them as a group. Ask your group, "Who in our congregation do you think embodies the qualities of a 'principled Christian leader.?'?"

AT HOME:

Prayerfully ponder the passages that are suggested above and then meditate upon the questions. What gifts has God given you as a leader? What do you think is the main principle that motivates a "principled Christian leader"?

PRAYER: Almighty God, we give thanks for the way that you have given your people, in every age, inspired leaders. In our own time and place, give us those who are inspired by your Holy Spirit and who model for the rest of us the humble, truthful, loving way of Christ. In the name of the One who led us out of sin and death and toward the loving presence and service of God we pray, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Creating new places for new people by starting new congregations and renewing existing ones

Activities

- 1. Read Acts 11:1-18.** This is an account of the so-called "Jerusalem Conference" when the early church had to come to some sort of compromise between the demands of Judaism and the Holy Spirit's inclusion of Gentiles into the Christian community. Any church that grows, that enjoys the Holy Spirit's inclusiveness, is going to have to make some changes in the way it does church! See the Wesleyan Core Terms for Christian Hospitality, Church, Lay Leadership and the Life Application Topics for Sacraments, Go and Tell, and Witnessing. What changes is your congregation having to make in order to be more hospitable to new people?
- 2. Read Luke 15:1-10.** Jesus got into trouble because of the company he kept. His critics complained "This fellow welcomes sinner and eats with them." In reply, Jesus told them these stories. Jesus saves the world by reaching out to sinners, by

dying for sinners. Do you think the contemporary church has become less passionate about reaching out to sinners and welcoming them to join (us!) sinners at the Lord's Table?

- 3. Read Matthew 28:16-20.** The risen Christ gives his followers their final words before his departure. This is the "Great Commission" to go into all the world, among all people and "make disciples." What has your congregation done recently to obey Jesus' mandate?

AS A GROUP:

Discuss the ways in which your congregation is already working to welcome newcomers to the faith. Do you think your church is more "outward" focused or "inward" focused? What changes need to be made in your church's inner life to make itself more welcoming and inviting to those who have yet to be reached for Christ?

AT HOME:

The United Methodist General Conference has added to our membership vows the promise to "witness" to our faith. What do the passages, listed just above, encourage you to be a better witness to your faith in Jesus Christ?

PRAYER:

Lord Jesus, in your life, teaching, death, and resurrection you reached out to sinners. You sought out the lost and brought them into God's Kingdom. Stir up in us a desire to join you in your seeking, reaching, and embracing work. Help us to see all people as you see them – as beloved members of your family, lambs of your flock, and beloved children of God. Help us to receive others as you have so graciously received us. Amen.

- **Engaging in ministries with the poor;**

- 1. Read Acts 9:36-43.** From the earliest days of the church, there were people like Tabitha who did works of mercy for the poor. John Wesley was convinced that there was not much wrong with any Christian's relationship with Christ that could not be helped by self-sacrificial works of love among the least fortunate and needy. See the Wesleyan Core Terms for Charity, Gratitude and Benevolence, Danger of Riches, Poverty, and Use of Money. See the Life Application Topics for Caring for the Poor, Caring for the Poor and the Stranger, Mercy, Mission, and Service.

List the ways that your congregation continues this practice today.

- 2. Read Isaiah 1:10-17.** A unique quality of the faith of Israel was Israel's conviction that God expected justice for the poor. In this passage the prophet Isaiah hears God say that God does not want fancy acts of worship from us – God desires that we "seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow." From its beginning, Wesleyan holiness meant good deeds done for the poor, justice. How do you fulfill this biblical mandate in your life today?

- 3. Read Exodus 20:8-11, 15, 17.** Note how many of the Ten Commandments deal with issues of justice toward our neighbor. The Ten Commandments give rights to those who,

before God's command had no rights. They link us to our neighbor's need. In what ways are we in the contemporary Christian community more guilty of focusing upon our needs than our neighbors' needs? What might we do differently in the way we do church to be more obedient to God's expectations for us?

Activities

AS A GROUP:

A theme that runs through the Wesley Study Bible, a theme that is discussed in many of the sidebars, is that Wesleyans serve the poor. Discuss any discoveries that you have made, as a group, in this area of Wesleyan Christian believing – truly Wesleyan Christians engage in ministries with the poor.

AT HOME:

What is one lifestyle change that you could make that would enable you to be more loving and caring of those near you who have needs?

PRAYER:

Lord Jesus, who for our sakes became poor, help us to see the poor and the needy in our midst. Convict our consciences about the ways in which we overlook their need or our injustice that contributes to their need. Fill us with your Spirit of love and concern, of active witness and works of mercy for those in need. Thus we fulfill your command to love our neighbor as much as we love ourselves. Amen.

- **Improving global health, especially attacking the killer diseases of poverty.**

1. Read Mark 1:21-45. Note that, in the very first part of Mark's Gospel, Jesus is engaged in ministries of healing, healing those who are afflicted in body or in mind. See the Wesleyan Core Terms for Healing, Health, Faith and Works, Visiting the Sick, and the Life Application Topics for Acts of Kindness, Comfort for Illness, and Compassion.

In what ways does your church continue Jesus' healing work today?

2. Read Luke 9:1-6. Jesus not only heals, he sends out a group of ordinary people, his disciples to "cure diseases." Jesus makes his followers into healers. In that day, few people had the power or the knowledge needed to "cure diseases." God has given us great resources for healing and health, yet those resources are unjustly distributed around the world. What do you think the church can do to obey Jesus' commission to go forth into all the world and "cure diseases everywhere"?

3. Read Acts 5:12-16. In our culture we have mostly given the church's healing ministry over to the health care profession. Many in your congregation are probably engaged in this ministry. In a world in which poor health is directly connected to poverty and need, what do you think contemporary Methodists could do to continue the early church's healing ministry?

Activities

AS A GROUP:

Do you believe that faith heals people? In what ways does God's miraculous healing work continue among us today? How can we make that amazing healing more available to more people in the world?

AT HOME:

Is there something you can do, in your own life, that will more faithfully engage you in fulfilling Jesus' command to go forth and participate in his ministry of healing killer diseases in all the world?

PRAYER:

Lord Jesus, the Savior who came to us in our great need and did for us that which we could not do for ourselves, call us anew to join with you in your saving work. Help us to witness to your coming Kingdom with our work for you in all of your world, among all of your beloved children. Stir up in us indignation at the injustice and the poverty that causes so much pain among our fellow sisters and brothers. Give us creativity and determination to do our part in your work in the world. Amen.